

Remarks
Ambassador D. Brent Hardt
Media Speakers – Journalism Workshop Launch
May 28, 2013

University of Guyana Deputy Vice Chancellor, Phillip Da Silva
UG Director of the School of Communication Studies, Carolyn Walcott
Ohio University's Director of the Institute for International Journalism, Dr. Yusuf Kalyango,
Distinguished Visiting Professor at Ohio University, Mr. Andy Alexander,
Members of the Press Corps,

Welcome and good afternoon. I am pleased to be here at the launch of our collaborative effort to hold this timely workshop: *Democracy, Journalism, and Responsibility: Expectations for an Informed Society* to Guyana. This is not the first university partnership between Ohio University and the University of Guyana – and I'm certain it will not be the last. These two historic institutions for higher education have joined forces on many fronts for the benefit of students, faculty, and public education in Guyana and the United States. Although OU and UG will be branching out into new fields and areas of study, to include health and medicine, the fine arts, and social sciences, the relationship between the Centre for Communication Studies and the Scripps School of Journalism is the first and most enduring of these partnerships. Our Embassy welcomes and encourages collaboration and alliances between U.S. and Guyanese institutions because these relationships enhance mutual understanding between our countries and build even closer people-to-people ties. This allows us to work together more closely to

address common challenges, including citizen security, economic opportunity, social inclusion, and environmental sustainability.

This week's workshop focuses on the development and professionalization of the press corps. Professionalization contributes to building a more effective and more independent media, while improving standards in collecting, reporting, editing and disseminating objective and balanced information. Such professional training encourages reporting that encompasses the many different facets of issues, and improves standards for reporters and editors to make the information they present more objective and balanced.

As we all recognize, the media play an indispensable role in building a democratic society. The press fosters active public debate and serves as a forum to express different points of view, particularly on behalf of those who are marginalized in society. It serves a crucial function in being one of the few institutions capable of promoting vigilance against abuses of the law and government authority. It does this through investigative journalism, by raising the transparency of judicial, legislative, and administrative proceedings, by its access to public officials and public documents, and, most importantly, by its ability to translate this access into clear, coherent, accessible, and interesting reporting.

Unfortunately, the press is often a target of retaliation or restrictions by those who feel threatened by freedom of expression and transparency in democratic processes. Journalists are often the first to uncover corruption, to report from the front lines of conflict zones, and to highlight missteps by governments. Because of their work, many journalists around the world face not only physical danger, but other attempts to silence their voices, such as legal intimidation and threats to their livelihood. It is the duty of governments and citizens worldwide to speak out for the protection of journalists, and to respect and protect their vital role in uncovering the truth. The United States, despite our own imperfections, remains a persistent advocate for the freedom of expression. We continue to raise media freedom issues in bilateral discussions with other governments as well as in multilateral bodies.

The United States Embassy in Guyana actively supports initiatives to strengthen journalistic ethics, to build media capacity, and to encourage professionalization for the press corps. This workshop is the latest example of our longstanding engagement with the media in Guyana. In October 2011, we organized two programs on the media and journalism:

- USAID, in collaboration with the University of Guyana's Centre for Communication Studies and the Guyana Elections Commission (GECOM), held a two-day training on the Media Code of Conduct in preparation for the 2011 General and Regional Elections. Participants included media owners, editors, and journalists from all the major print, audio, visual, and internet-based media. Over Fifty media owners and practitioners signed the Media Code of Conduct for Elections.
- The Embassy's Public Affairs Section hosted Professor Smith from Washington and Lee University as part of a speaker program to offer basic journalism training to new and aspiring journalists. Professor Smith worked with over 90 students at UG and also led workshops on journalism for entry-level reporters. Program participants were able to improve their ability to accurately and objectively report news and events in order to better inform the public and strengthen accountability for public figures.

Our Embassy also frequently sponsors exchanges specifically for journalists, so that they can share experiences and challenges with other journalists from around the world and learn more about the U.S. media environment. Last year, the Public Affairs Section sponsored two *Stabroek News* reporters to participate in our

Foreign Press Center Tours in the United States. One was on Women's Empowerment, which focused on the theme of combating gender-based violence and empowering women. The other, on LGBT Issues in the United States, gave journalists a chance to hear from key stakeholders across the political spectrum and learn about the positive inroads LGBT Americans have made in government, politics, media, and education. We also sent a member of the Guyanese media on a Media Literacy-themed International Visitor Leadership Program. The exchange highlighted the scope of new media and social networking tools and how they can be used to promote citizens' rights and responsibilities. We look forward to hosting more exchanges for members of the press corps, in order to enhance professional journalism, strengthen the development of the media, and promote accurate, fair, and responsible reporting.

The United States always encourages networking with international journalism associations and institutions that can enhance professionalism with workshops, program support, and technical assistance. We are very fortunate to have with us this week two very accomplished media experts, who have traveled long and far to share with us their vast knowledge and experience as media practitioners and as academic media experts. *[Add background on Visiting Guests.]* American business magnate, investor, and philanthropist Warren Buffett

once said, “the smarter the journalists are, the better off society is. For to a degree, people read the press to inform themselves -- and the better the teacher, the better the student body.” With that in mind, I wish you a very informative and productive week of training. Thank you.